

Chapter 3

Project Description

Introduction

This chapter describes the proposed *Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Plan* (plan or project). The project description provided below highlights the key features of the plan. The plan itself, prepared by Moffatt & Nichol in association with Heal the Bay (June 2005) for California State Parks and the Coastal Conservancy, is included in its entirety in Appendix A and should be considered a companion document to this EIR as it inherently represents the most thorough description of the proposed actions.

In accordance with the requirements of CEQA (Section 15124), the project description provides information about location and boundaries of the proposed project, a statement of objectives, and a general description of the various characteristics of the project. A brief summary of the intended uses of the EIR is also provided.

Project Background

Southern California has lost approximately 95 percent of its historic coastal wetlands. As a result of urban encroachments, the lagoon as we see it today is a very small portion of its historic area. The PCH bridge has dissected and constricted the lagoon surface area, and a significant portion of the once low-lying areas near the mouth of Malibu Creek were filled in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1970s the site was completely filled and was covered by two baseball fields.

Increased urbanization and imported water upstream in the Malibu Creek Watershed has increased the volume of water transported into the lagoon and urban pollution has greatly diminished the quality of the water through inputs of nutrients, sediments, and pollutants.

Several restoration efforts have been made in the past. In 1983, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) initiated a restoration of the lagoon, which involved the excavation of three channels, seeding with salt marsh plants, and creation of a series of boardwalks to allow for public access. In 1996, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) funded a restoration plan to

mitigate for impacts incurred during the Malibu Lagoon PCH Bridge Replacement Project. This restoration project was conducted by the DPR and RCDSMM and included the very successful tidewater goby habitat enhancement project and the revegetation of areas disturbed by construction activities with native species, including extensive removal of non-native species.

In the late 1990s, the Coastal Conservancy funded a study by UCLA to identify the status of the ecological health and water quality in the lower creek and the lagoon systems and to recommend best management practices and restoration options.

Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives

Since the 1850s, 90 percent of California's original coastal wetland acreage has disappeared, and many of the remaining wetlands are in danger of being further degraded or destroyed due to landfill, diking, dredging, pollution, and other human disturbances. However, a growing awareness of the importance of this habitat has led to efforts to protect existing wetlands, and to restore those that have been degraded.¹

The purpose of the plan is to restore and enhance the ecological conditions of the lagoon and improve public access and education about the lagoon. The plan presents information regarding the current condition of the lagoon, goals and strategies for the restoration, and implementation of a monitoring plan. Essentially, the plan offers strategies to enhance the lagoon as one of the few remaining California coastal wetlands, prevent further deterioration of the lagoon, improve visitors' experience, and educate the public about the lagoon's ecosystem processes. The project will increase wetlands (marsh) habitat at the existing lagoon, enhance tidal influence, and improve circulation, remove exotic invasive vegetation species, and increase native vegetation while enhancing the visitor and recreational experience.

The Lead Agency has identified the following major objectives for the proposed project:

- Decrease urban runoff from surrounding sources into the lagoon to improve its water quality and decrease eutrophication.
- Increase circulation of water during open and closed conditions.
- Restore habitat by re-establishing suitable soil conditions and native plant species and removing non-native species.
- Relocate existing parking lot to increase habitat size and utilize permeable surfaces.

¹ California's Coastal Wetlands: <http://ceres.ca.gov/ceres/calweb/coastal/wetlands.html>.

² Over-enrichment of a water body with nutrients, resulting in excessive growth of organisms and depletion of dissolved oxygen concentration.

- Evaluate, record, and analyze existing and changing ecological conditions of the lagoon using physical, chemical, and biological parameters to allow agencies, organizations, and stakeholders to monitor progress towards restoration goals.
- Provide improved visitor and educational amenities.

Project Location and Setting

Physical Setting

Malibu Lagoon is a 31-acre shallow water embayment occurring at the terminus of the Malibu Creek Watershed, the second largest watershed draining into Santa Monica Bay and within Malibu Lagoon State Beach. The lagoon empties into the Pacific Ocean at Malibu Surfrider Beach (See Figures 3-1 and 3-2). The lagoon is located generally south of the intersection of PCH and Cross Creek Road in the City of Malibu. Existing land uses on the project site are primarily recreational and supportive of open space and habitat preservation. Onsite amenities include a surface parking lot, walking and beach access trails, a picnic area, and portable restroom facilities.

Surrounding Land Uses

The area in the immediate vicinity of the lagoon contains a mix of land uses. Commercial uses and civic center offices are located north of the project site, across PCH. This commercial and civic area is contained within the Malibu Land Use Plan Civic Center Overlay Boundary. Malibu Creek also extends to the north of the site. Adjacent to the east of the lagoon, and within Malibu Lagoon State Beach, is the National Register-listed historic Adamson House. Immediately to the west of the site is a fenced private golf course, and bordering on the southwest is a strip of medium density single-family residences with beach frontage (Malibu Colony). Additional recreational uses are located to the south at Malibu Lagoon State Beach/Surfrider Beach and the Pacific Ocean.

³ City of Malibu General Plan, November 1995.

⁴ City of Malibu Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan, September 2002.

Figure 3-1. Regional Location Map

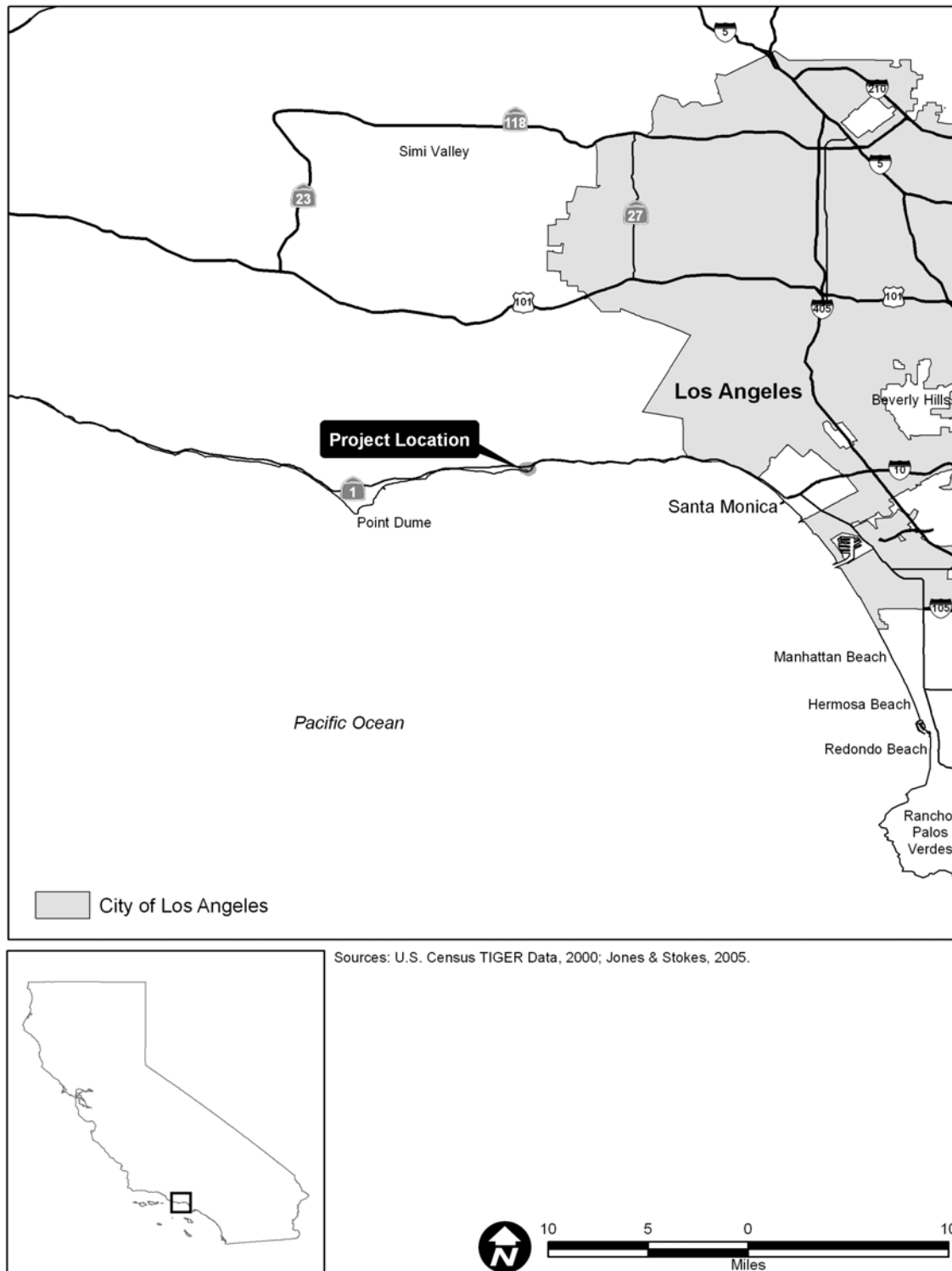
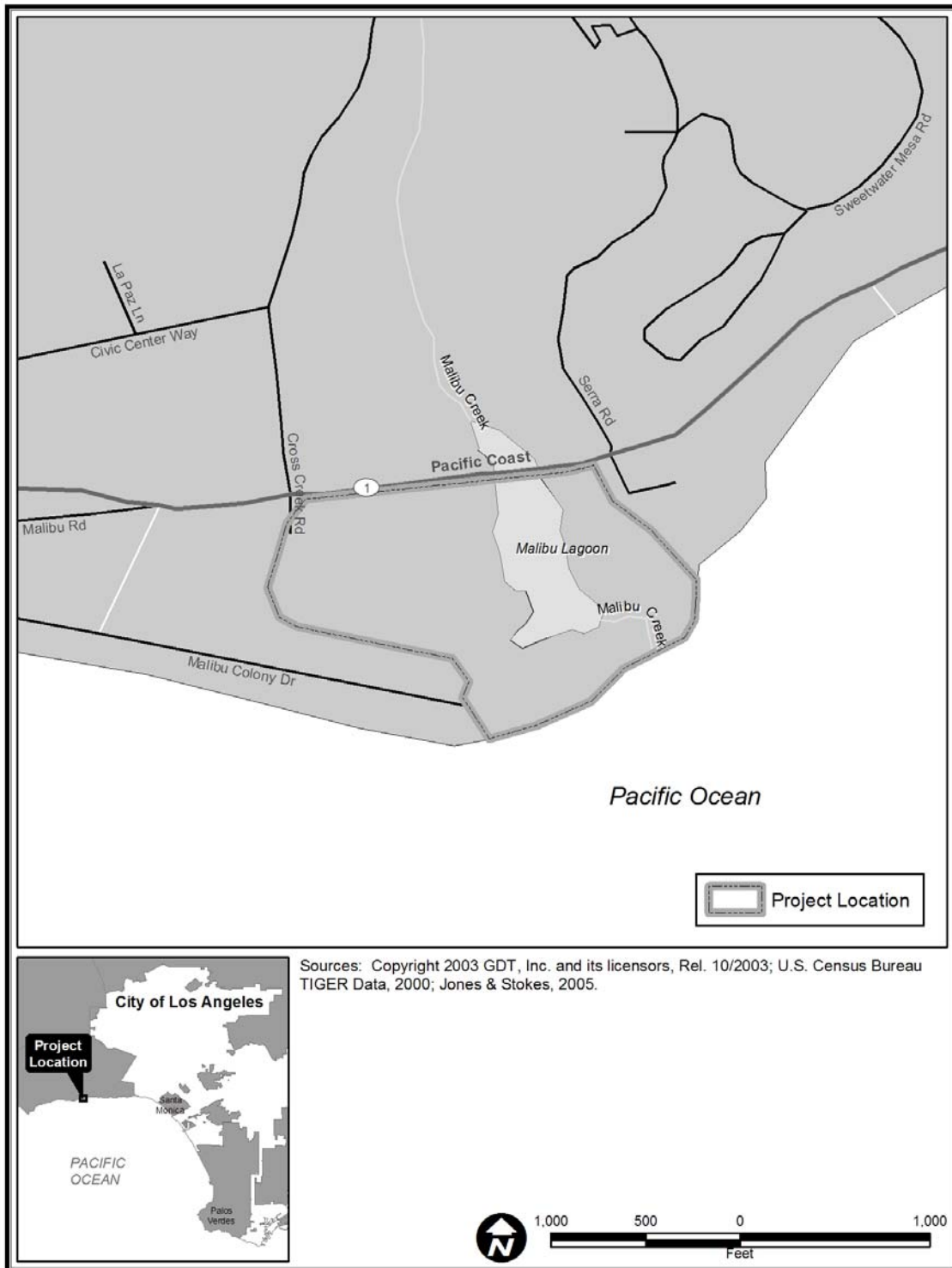


Figure 3-2. Project Vicinity Map



Proposed Project

Based on the findings of the *Final Alternatives Analysis for the Malibu Lagoon Restoration Feasibility Study*, and discussions amongst DPR, the Coastal Conservancy, the LRWG, and LTAC, Alternative 1.5, the Modified Restore and Enhance Alternative, was selected as the proposed project. Alternative 1.5 embodies the lagoon restoration goals with the least amount of impacts to the existing lagoon ecosystem (see Figure 3-3). Please see Chapter 11 for details of other alternatives to the project that were considered. The *Final Alternatives Analysis* document is available online at: <http://www.healthebay.org/currentissues/mlhep/default.asp>.

Major components of the design are explained below.

Parking Lot and Staging Lawn

The existing parking lot would be relocated to the north and west to be adjacent to the PCH. The new parking lot and staging areas would be created with runoff treatment controls, including permeable pavement or other similar permeable substances, appropriate native vegetation, and would include a staging area to enhance existing educational and recreational uses of the site. The current number of parking spaces would remain and new interpretive displays and panels would be installed.

Main Channel

The main channel would remain substantially “as is.” The western edge of the main lagoon at the interface with the western arms complex would be reconfigured in the form of a naturalized slope to provide a degree of separation between main lagoon and west channel system.

Eastern Channel

The existing boathouse channel would be deepened and recontoured to create a new avian island along the bank of the Adamson House grounds. This would create additional mudflat habitat and promote additional water circulation around the new island.

West Lagoon Complex

The project presents a comprehensive approach to restore and enhance the ecological structure and function of the lagoon, as well as to enhance visitors’ experience through improvements to access and interpretation.

Figure 3-3. Proposed Project Plan



Project Implementation and Management Approach

The project employs a holistic approach to habitat restoration. The overall restoration plan has individual elements such as the Water Management Plan, Habitat Plan, Access, Education, and Interpretation Plan, and Monitoring Plan. The salient features of this holistic approach are listed below:

Water Management Plan

The Water Management Plan is designed to eliminate all polluted runoff discharges to the lagoon in order to improve lagoon water quality, and to improve and maintain circulation within the lagoon under all conditions. Direct surface discharges to the lagoon can occur from storm water and from irrigation. In order to manage the storm water, several strategies may be employed including:

Permeable Pavement

The parking lot and entrance road will be constructed with permeable materials to allow water to percolate into underlying soil and eventually the groundwater zone.

Drainage Swales

Drainage swales may be installed along the perimeter of hardscape areas such as the parking lot to intercept surface runoff that is not infiltrated into the parking lot. A swale of approximate size three feet deep by nine feet wide may be constructed. The exact location of the swales is not known at this point in project development. The drainage swales are intended to be large enough to hold runoff from the 100-year storm before it begins to overflow. The habitat formed with the swales would be designed to be complementary to the wetland.

Redirection of Storm Water

In order to redirect storm water away from the lagoon and towards other appropriate drainage facilities, two options are under consideration. One option would be to downward slope the parking lot towards the north, such that the run-off flows in a direction opposite to the lagoon. Such run-off could be conveyed to a swale or other conveyance feature (trench or pipe) to move farther away from the lagoon. The other option would be to route the drainage westward toward the collection sump for the City of Malibu's future force main line along Malibu Road. The run-off

from the future parking lot could be routed to the sump near Malibu Colony at the south end of the future force line, and then be included in water pumped upstream toward the future treatment plant near Cross Creek Road and Civic Center Way. Four drains currently exist from private homes in the Colony that shall be incorporated into the future treatment plant.

Irrigation

Water can be inadvertently contributed to the lagoon by temporary and permanent irrigation of plantings at landscaped areas. As the lagoon is a natural habitat area, permanent irrigation will not be implemented. Supplemental irrigation, either passive or active, may be installed. Active irrigation would include implementation of a temporary irrigation system (overhead spray, drip, tended watering, or a combination of these methods) to assist in establishment of plant materials. A passive method would involve a hydrophilic amendment to be used in the planting soils or as a binding agent for seed.

Circulation

Water within the lagoon needs to circulate to remain of suitable quality for use as habitat. A monitoring system would be installed to compare water quality data pre- and post-restoration.

Habitat Plan

The Habitat Plan addresses the initial enhancement and establishment of habitats within the restored lagoon system as well as the on-going maintenance and management activities required to ensure that restoration habitat objectives are achieved.

The habitat design would include the following features:

Slopes and Sediment Types

Habitat restoration within the restored lagoon is highly dependent upon development of suitable hydrologic soil conditions and the availability of desirable reproductive plant materials to colonize the restoration areas. To accomplish the desired restoration, appropriate considerations to elevations, slopes, and sediment characteristics would be made.

Topsoil and Sediment Salvage and Management

Development of habitat designs would necessitate stockpiling and reuse of suitable sediments to obtain the physical and chemical conditions to support the desired biological communities.

Restoration Planting and Natural Establishment

Depending on the habitat type (Marsh, Nontidal Southern Coastal Salt Marsh, Riparian, Coastal Dune/Bluff Scrub), a suitable restoration approach would be chosen (natural recruitment and salvaged plant transplants, natural recruitment, seeding and container planting). Many of the desired species that exist in lagoon habitats would be salvaged and transplants may be undertaken to minimize the need for new plantings.

Maintaining Unvegetated Habitat Areas

Undesirable vegetation would be regularly removed from the naturally open unvegetated habitat areas, such as mudflats, channels, exposed avian islands, beaches, and dunes.

Minimizing Habitat Losses from Seasonal Inundation

In order to minimize habitat loss as a result of seasonal inundation, a variety of measures may be undertaken including developing an undulating topography within the seasonally inundated habitats, incorporating vegetation that tolerates prolonged exposure to anoxic soil conditions and promotes increased oxygenation of waters during inundation periods.

Long-term Habitat Maintenance

Protection against invasive exotic species would require on-going exotic plant control efforts. In addition to threats of exotic species invasion, high nutrient loading within the lagoon would need to be controlled.

Access, Education, and Interpretation Plan

This plan includes proposed relocation of the parking lot along PCH, and provision of multiple interpretive nodes and areas for educational programs. This would allow for more ground surface area for wetland habitat restoration. The existing parking capacity would remain unchanged due to relocation of the parking lot. A new bus and Park Link shuttle stop would be reconfigured based on the new location of the parking lot. In addition, the existing trail along the perimeter of the western arms complex would be improved for use as the primary beach access trail. Three primary interpretive nodes would be provided near the parking area.

Some of the additional features of the plan include provision of storage and restroom facilities near entry parking circle, enhanced access to the east lagoon over PCH Bridge with interpretive signage and graphics, and an interpretive overlook at Adamson House boat dock.

Monitoring Plan

In order to measure improvements in the lagoon system, the monitoring plan aims to standardize sampling protocols, select monitoring parameters, and acquire a reliable baseline dataset.

Construction Scenario

Construction of the project would occur in two phases. The first phase of construction involves relocation of the existing parking lot closer to the park entrance and PCH. During this phase, the existing parking lot, which is located at the northern portion of the project site, would be removed. The northwestern portion of the project site, adjacent to PCH, would be graded and paved for the new parking lot. The first phase of construction would occur between November 2006 and January 2007.

The second phase of construction would occur at the lagoon. Construction activities at the lagoon would primarily involve earthwork. The second phase of construction would begin after completion of the Phase 1 parking lot construction in 2007.

The CEQA Environmental Review Process

CEQA requires the preparation of an EIR when there is substantial evidence that a project may have a significant effect on the environment. The purpose of an EIR is to provide decision makers, public agencies, and the general public with an objective and informational document that fully discloses the potential environmental effects of the proposed project.

The EIR process is specially designed to facilitate the objective evaluation of potentially significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed project and identify potentially feasible mitigation measures and alternatives that reduce or avoid the project's significant effects. In addition, CEQA specifically requires that an EIR identify those adverse impacts determined to be significant after mitigation.

In accordance with CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, which are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with Section 15000, a Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (NOP) was distributed on October 28, 2005, to the State Office of Planning and Research and responsible and trustee agencies as well as private organizations and individuals that may have an interest in the proposed project. The NOP was also published in the *Malibu Times* and *Malibu Surfside News* on October 27, 2005.

The purpose of the NOP was to provide notification that DPR, as lead agency, planned to prepare an EIR for the proposed project and solicit guidance on the scope and content of the EIR. The NOP presented a description of the proposed project, potential environmental effects, instructions on how to provide comments, and the date, time, and location of the public scoping meeting that was held at Malibu City Hall the evening of November 16, 2005. The NOP and copies of all letters received in response to the NOP are included in Appendix B.

Approximately 15 persons attended the scoping meeting. An overview and history of the lagoon, the proposed Plan, and CEQA requirements were presented. The presentation included a chronology of preceding lagoon restoration actions that ultimately led to the development the proposed Plan. During the public comment portion of the meeting, questions were raised concerning construction phase beach access, biological impacts, and the methodology used to determine impacts. All questions and concerns raised at the scoping meeting have been addressed in this EIR.

As the lead agency under CEQA, DPR directed the preparation of this EIR through the use of professional environmental services contractors. This EIR, however, reflects the independent judgment of DPR and is intended to comply with CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines (see Public Resources Code, §21100; State CEQA Guidelines, §§15120–15132).

The Draft EIR was circulated for public review and comment for a period of 45 days (January 20, 2006, through March 6, 2006). During that period, comments from the general public, organizations, and agencies regarding environmental issues raised in the Draft EIR and the Draft EIR's accuracy and completeness were submitted to DPR.

Upon completion of the public review period, a Final EIR was prepared. The Final EIR includes the comments on the Draft EIR received during the formal public review period as well as responses to those comments (see Chapter 13 for all comment letters received and DPR responses).

Pursuant to Section 21081.6 of the Public Resources Code, public agencies, when approving a project, must also adopt a monitoring or reporting program for the changes that were incorporated into the project or made a condition of project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment. The reporting or monitoring program is adopted at the time of project approval and must be designed to ensure compliance during project implementation. The mitigation monitoring program for the project is included in Chapter 2 of this EIR (see Table 2-2).

Finally, prior to approval of the proposed project, CEQA also requires DPR to adopt “findings” with respect to each significant environmental effect identified in the EIR (Public Resources Code, §21081; State CEQA Guidelines, §15091). A Findings of Fact and Statement of

Overriding Considerations report was prepared for this project as a companion document to the Malibu Lagoon Restoration and Enhancement Plan Final EIR. Findings were made for each potentially significant effect associated with the proposed project (as identified in this EIR). The findings demonstrate that all but one potentially significant impact (temporary and intermittent construction noise) could be reduced to a level of insignificance with the incorporation of mitigation measures.

Accordingly, DPR prepared a Statement of Overriding Considerations, acknowledging the potentially significant and unavoidable (albeit temporary and intermittent) construction noise impact that may result from implementation of the project. However, having (1) adopted all feasible mitigation measures; (2) rejected the alternatives to the project discussed above; (3) recognized all significant, unavoidable impacts; and (4) balanced the benefits of the proposed project against the significant and unavoidable effects, DPR made a determination that the benefits of the project to the public outweigh and override the potentially significant unavoidable construction phase noise impact.

A copy of the Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations is available for public review at the DPR Angeles District office located at 1925 Las Virgenes Road, Calabasas, California 91302. DPR is the custodian of record for the proposed project and EIR.

Intended Uses of the EIR

According to Section 15121 of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR is a public document used by a public agency to analyze the potentially significant environmental effects of a proposed project, identify alternatives, and disclose possible ways to reduce or avoid possible environmental damage. As an informational document, an EIR does not recommend approval or denial of the project. The main purpose of an EIR is to inform governmental decision makers and the public about potential environmental impacts of the project.

Accordingly, this EIR will be used by DPR, as the lead agency under CEQA, in making decisions with regard to approval of the project and its implementation.

The information in this EIR may also be used by other agencies identified below in deciding whether to grant permits or approvals necessary to construct or operate the proposed project:

- The Army Corps of Engineers would issue permits pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors.

- The CDFG would issue a Streambed Alteration Agreement pursuant to Section 1601 of the California Fish and Game Code.
- The CCC would issue a Coastal Development Permit pursuant to the California Coastal Act of 1976.
- The Los Angeles RWQCB would issue a Water Quality Certification pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act.
- The City of Malibu would issue a Coastal Development Permit for construction of the Phase 1 parking lot improvements within City jurisdiction.
- An encroachment permit for work within Caltrans ROW may also be required.

Organization of the EIR

- Chapter 1 of this EIR provides an introduction to the project. This chapter provides an overview of the CEQA process and the agencies involved.
- Chapter 2 of this EIR is the summary chapter that provides an overview of the detailed information contained in subsequent chapters. The summary includes a table that summarizes the potential environmental impacts in each resource area, the significance determination, mitigation measures, and the level of significance after mitigation for those impacts.
- Chapter 3 of this EIR provides a detailed description of the proposed project as well as the project objectives, location, characteristics, and construction scenario. A description of the intended uses of the EIR and public agency actions, and this section describing the organization of the EIR.
- Chapter 4 of this EIR describes the project's relationship to local and regional planning documents.
- Chapter 5 of this EIR describes the potential environmental effects to hydrology and water quality including a discussion of the environmental setting for the resource, environmental impacts as a result of the project, and required mitigation measures.
- Chapter 6 of this EIR describes the potential environmental effects to biological resources, including a discussion of the environmental setting for the resource, environmental impacts as a result of the project, and required mitigation measures.
- Chapter 7 of this EIR describes the potential environmental effects to cultural resources, including a discussion of the environmental setting for the resource, environmental impacts as a result of the project, and required mitigation measures.
- Chapter 8 of this EIR describes the project's potential construction effects in the areas of air quality, biological resources, cultural

resources, hydrology and water quality, noise, and traffic and circulation. Mitigation measures are listed as requirements to reduce temporary construction impacts.

- Chapter 9 of this EIR describes the effects considered not significant under CEQA. Because an Initial Study was not prepared prior to initiating the EIR analysis, Chapter 9 describes all the environmental topic areas that bear little relation to the project, such as agricultural resources, mineral resources, and aesthetics.
- Chapter 10 of this EIR provides an overview of the potential cumulative environmental effects of the proposed project when considered together with other development projects in the area.
- Chapter 11 of this EIR describes and analyzes the No-Project Alternative and other alternatives that were considered during the planning process. It also identifies the environmentally superior alternative.
- Chapter 12 provides sources and references used in the preparation of this EIR.
- Chapter 13 contains all comment letters received during the Draft EIR comment period, as well as DPR's responses to those comments.

Appendices to the EIR follow Chapter 13, including the full text of the Restoration Plan, public notices, and technical calculations.

